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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI REGIONS PROFILE

1. (U) SUMMARY: The great economic disparity between the capital, Djibouti city, and the regions outside Djibouti's capital is a major concern to the regions' inhabitants. This disparity led to a civil war in the early 1990's and continues to greatly affect the country's politics. Post constructed this regional profile of Djibouti to better understand the development issues most important to the populations in each of Djibouti's four existing districts as both presidential and regional elections approach in 2005. It is divided into three parts: A snapshot of each district, district living conditions, and political expectations and leanings. END SUMMARY

SNAPSHOTS OF THE DISTRICTS

2. (U) Djibouti is currently divided into the capital city, commonly referred to as Djibouti-ville, and four regional districts: Ali-Sabieh and Dikhil in the south, and Obock and Tadjourah in the north. Vital statistics follow:

Ali Sabieh
Location: South
Population: 18 589
Major economic activity: Trade, agriculture and industry.
Tribe/sub-tribe: Issa/Fourlaba

Dikhil
Location: South
Population: 19 592
Major economic activities: Agriculture, livestock and tourism (underdeveloped)
Tribe/sub-tribe: Issa/Odahgob, Afar/AdaiRasoul

Tadjourah
Location: North
Population: 12 471
Major economic activities: Agriculture and tourism
Tribe/sub-tribe: Afar/Hassobas

Obock
Location: North
Population: 3 297
Major economic activities: Fishing and tourism
Tribe/sub-tribe: Afar/Adai'li

Living Conditions

3. (U) The great economic disparity between Djibouti's capital and its internal regions affects the regions' populations to an extreme degree. The majority of economic activity in Djibouti is concentrated in and around the capital, Djibouti City. There is a limited overall benefit from trucking routes to Ethiopia that pass through the districts of Dikhil and Ali-Sabieh. Social sectors, such as education and health, are also more developed in the capital. The population of Djibouti is estimated at around 594,000 with 67 percent concentrated in the capital city. The population of the four regions together total less than nine percent of the total population of Djibouti. The sparse population in the districts is an excellent indicator of the underdevelopment of the outlying regions, which in return reveals the major impetus for the majority of the population to seek subsistence in the capital city.

4. (U) In general, the districts' output in the national economy is very low. Rarely do products go from the regions to the capital. On the contrary, most of the needs of the district's population are brought from the capital city, Djibouti-ville. Until recently, there was no industry or manufacturing present outside the capital. In 2004, the government began projects to bring manufacturing and production to the district of Ali-Sabieh in order to court political favor. A water bottling plant was inaugurated in early 2004 and a cement production facility has started. To date, the production level of these two plants has been negligible.

5. (U) Extreme poverty, unemployment and access to potable water of utmost concern for most of the district residents. Unemployment rates range from 61 percent in Obock and

Tadjourah to 71 percent in Ali-Sabieh, the same district that hosted the three biggest public and semi-public investments in the districts during recent years. Despite some recent investment in the districts, there has not been a strategy to ensure the local population is benefiting from jobs created by the new ventures. Even among districts, the disparity of employment opportunities is growing. All recent investments have been centered on the southern districts of the country, due to its rich soil and unpredictable political leanings. Little government attention has been directed toward the northern region, and as a result there are no viable jobs available in these districts. Most northern residents eke out a living in the struggling fishing industry or subsist as goat, camel or sheep herders and as small-scale farmers of date palms or vegetables. Poverty is not declining in the regions despite the establishment of civil society organizations that claim to struggle against it.

15. (U) Even with a massive national effort to spread employment opportunities across the districts, serious obstacles confront any attempts at progress. One of the most-dire needs in all of the districts is water. Nearly 47 percent of the inhabitants of Tadjourah do not have access to potable drinking water. The same is true for 27.5 percent of the population of Obock; 21 percent of Dikhil and 5.5 percent of Ali-Sabieh. The amount of the total family budget spent on food is nearly 70 percent in all four of the districts. Most people who live outside the city feel it is useless to talk of economic opportunities or progress until their most basic needs can be assured.

16. (U) Access to health care and education are also severely lacking in most areas of the country outside the capital city. In each region, there is one health center and one primary education establishment, located in the district capital. Primary education is compulsory but access to schools is very difficult. In the country as a whole, the current education system has the physical capacity to accommodate only 30 percent of school-aged children. The primary education rate in the districts is roughly the same in all four regions, ranging between 55 and 60 percent. The percentage of children that go on to secondary school is significantly lower due mainly to the necessity for children to go to the capital to study the university preparatory or vocational curriculums.

17. (U) Daily lifestyle well-illustrates wealth in Djiboutian society. For those in the capital city, and those in the districts that are not nomadic, home-ownership is the main indicator of wealth. For the nomadic portion of the population, wealth rests with the size of the herd. Nomads value their animals in a hierarchy. The goat, which provides milk and meat for the family, is the most valued, followed in descending order by cows, sheep and camels. If all the country's wealth were measured by housing, Obock would be the poorest district with only 575 houses for an estimated population of 3,200 people. Under this measure, the two richest districts would be the southern district of Ali-Sabieh (2969 houses for 18,500 people) and Dikhil (2829 for 19,592 people).

18. (U) The economic activities of the different districts have a common base in agricultural subsistence. However, the extent of agriculture practiced and the variety of other activities possible depend upon the district. Activities in the northern regions, which have drier climate but abundant coastline, are concentrated around fishing. The northern district of Tadjourah also has two tourist sites that generate small amount of income. The southern districts have comparatively fertile soil, which leads many to concentrate their activities in farming and herding. Raising livestock is a major activity for the nomads in the southern region. Its success is by genetic mixing of the herds caused when livestock from Somaliland pass through the region in search of grazing. Although Dikhil is the less-fertile southern district, it has a history of being comparatively wealthy, thanks to smuggling. Dikhil was once the hub for all smuggled goods coming from Ethiopia and in the early 1980's, was the most flourishing region, after the capital. However, in recent years, the smuggling operations have shifted their focus to the Djibouti-Somaliland border and the smuggling in Dikhil has decreased. In absence of smuggling, the district of Dikhil has quickly become one of the poorest regions of Djibouti.

POLITICS

19. (U) The population in the four districts has few political expectations from elected officials. Each district is more focused on basic needs than on political maneuverings. In Ali-Sabieh the issue is water scarcity, which prevents development of any kind. (Note: Water scarcity is one of the biggest challenges everywhere in the country, including the capital city. End note). The district of Dikhil is concerned

primarily with women's health and the availability of veterinarians (since the district's livelihood is derived mainly from livestock). Health problems and lack of road connections, especially with Ethiopia, remain the biggest challenge for Tadjourah in its search for development. The population of Obock is seeking water and rehabilitation of roads to connect Obock with Eritrea and the other cities within Djibouti to improve quality of life.

10. (U) The regional councils are responsible for all matters concerning the wellbeing of each district's population. They are currently appointed by the central government, are comprised of 14 members and are headed by the District Commissar (DC). The councils each have a budget of 50 million FD (280 000 USD), which is currently supplied by the central treasury. The DC heads the provisional regional council, controls law enforcement agents, and has command of military forces assigned to the district. He also signs birth certificates and conducts primary immigration investigations. The DC is not autonomous, however. He is a servant of the ruling party and his investigations are often directed by the central administration. The role of the DC is much more significant as elections approach because of his duties as the subordinate of the Ministry of Interior. He gives primary authorization to identity cards and can approve ad hoc voting cards. Once implemented, the new decentralization law will restrain functions of the DC and limit his portfolio to merely a representative of the State. The administrative and financial control of the regions will be turned over to elected regional councils.

11. (U) Two tribes predominate Djibouti's social and political scene. The northern districts, Tadjourah and Obock, are inhabited by Afars. Ali-Sabieh is comprised mainly of Issas. Dikhil is a rare combination of all national communities: Afar, Issa, Arabs and others. For this reason it is called the "Town of Unity". The Issa community is generally viewed as more open to modernization, while the more traditional Afars are often considered more reluctant to change.

12. (U) In order to analyze the potential outcomes for the 2005 presidential elections, it helps to examine details from the most recent elections:

Ali-Sabieh: In the presidential election of 1999, Moussa Ahmed Idriss opposed Ismail Omar Guelleh. Guelleh won the elections by 74 percent; however, the majority in Ali-Sabieh voted against Guelleh's ruling party, an unprecedented case in Djibouti elections' history. One explanation for this might be that the district is known as "rebellious," and has a general dislike for directives coming from the capital. Because of this, Ali-Sabieh is considered by politicians to be unpredictable and problematic. This might be one of the reasons the political power focuses development projects in that area, over other regions. The tribal composition of Ali-Sabieh may also be a factor. The majority of Ali-Sabieh inhabitants are Issa, sub-clan Fourlaba. This sub-clan is known to be the most forceful rival to Mamassan sub-clan, to which Guelleh's family belongs. In 1999, Guelleh's rival, Moussa Ahmed Idriss -- an Issa, but not a Mamassan -- succeeded in winning the vote in Ali Sabieh.

Tadjourah: In the legislative elections of 2003, the opposition Union for Democratic Alternance (UAD) coalition made its strongest showing in Tadjourah. The UAD scored 18 bureaus out of 27, winning nearly all the Tadjourah-ville vote, as well as that of some of big villages of the district. The Minister of the Interior explained that the Guelleh-coalition won the district, nevertheless, because the nine bureaus it won were theoretically the most populous.

Dikhil: Dikhil generally votes on the side of the ruling party in both presidential and legislative elections. As a peaceful and quiet district where Afars, Issas and other communities get along well with each other, it has thus far been adverse to conflict and has in the past voted in favor of the ruling party.

Obock: Obock is unpredictable, as it does not belong to one particular Afar community. The district of Obock was the hometown of the late Ahmed Dini, a popular opposition leader who was exiled from Djibouti for 22-years¹. Life in the region is difficult, with poverty so firmly established that voters do not believe their situation will change, no matter the promises made during campaigns. That makes the region more likely to vote against the ruling party than in other districts, as in the 2003 legislative election, where the UAD scored highly, walking off with most of the votes cast. 13. (U) In conclusion, the political leanings of the districts are fluid depending, on each administration's promises and the level of discontent among the people at any given point in time. In that regard, no standardized prediction of district leanings in the 2005 presidential election can be made.

14. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.

1 I think it's preferable to be erased.